



PRESENTATION

Harris County Proposed Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)

Submitted to Commissioners Court November 9, 2021

Why Establish a Harris County Sexual Assault Team?





Background

2019

- An estimated 139,815 rapes were reported to law enforcement (UCR)
- There were an estimated 459,310 rape/sexual assaults nationwide (NCVS)

2020

- There were an estimated 319,950 rape/sexual assaults (NCVS)
- In Texas, there were 13,327 rapes and 16,969 sexual assaults reported to law enforcement
- There were 2,495 reported rapes in Harris County (which is down 3.5% from 2019)



Under Reporting

- Sexual assault is considered by many the least reported of crimes
- Only about 9-23% of survivors report their victimization to law enforcement
- Many reasons why survivors do not report, including
 - Embarrassment
 - Fear of being blamed
 - Belief that systems will not help or be hurtful
 - Fear of retaliation





What is a Sexual Assault Response Team?

Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs)

- Developed in the 1970s to improve community response to sexual assault
- Include individuals from different disciplines, community organizations, and criminal justice agencies (e.g., prosecutors, law enforcement)
- Core mission: to prioritize victims' needs and improve community response to sexual assault



What is SB 476 by Senator Jane Nelson?

- SB 476 mandates the creation of a county based sexual assault response team.
 - Brings together stakeholders with expertise on sexual assault
 - Create a written protocol to establish community processes for the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault
 - Maintain data on sexual assault
 - Number of assaults reported, investigations and prosecutions of these
 - Present written report to Commissioners Court

A nighttime photograph of a city skyline. In the foreground, a large, ornate building with a prominent dome is illuminated. In the background, several tall skyscrapers are lit up against the dark sky.

Who Serves on the SART?

SB 476 requires that the team consist of:

1. Chief Administrator of a Sexual Assault Program that provides services within the County;
2. A prosecutor with jurisdiction over adult sexual assault cases in the County;
3. The Sheriff of the County, or their designee;
4. The Chief of the largest municipal law enforcement agency, if one exists, or their designee;
5. A sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Forensic Examiner that provides exams within the County, or if they do not exist, a representative from the largest healthcare provider in the County;
6. A mental or behavioral health provider within the County, or if they do not exist a representative from the public health department; and
7. Other persons or professionals the SART considers necessary for the operation of the response team.



What Does the SART Have to Do?

- Meet at least quarterly
- Develop a written protocol for responding to adult survivors within the community
- SART must review and amend any response team protocols, forms, or guidelines
- Present report to Commissioners Court no later than December 1 of each odd-numbered year



Candidates for the Inaugural SART

Chief Administrator of sexual assault program

- Emilee Whitehurst, President & CEO of Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)
- Sonia Corrales, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)

A prosecutor with jurisdiction over adult sexual assault cases in the County

- Johna Stallings (primary), Division Chief of Adult Sex Crimes and Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office
- Jamie Burro (back-up), Felony Chief Adult Sex Crimes and Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office
- Celeste Byrom (back-up), Division Chief and Director of Victim Services Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office





Candidates for the Inaugural SART (cont.)

The Sheriff of the County, or their designee

- Lieutenant Gale Johnson, Adult Special Crimes Section, Harris County Sheriff's Office
- Sergeant Tommy Smith, Adult Special Crimes Section, Harris County Sheriff's Office
- Deputy Oscar Cisneros, Deputy Investigator, Criminal Investigations Bureau, Adult Special Crimes Section, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Harris County Sheriff's Office

The Chief of the largest municipal law enforcement agency, if one exists, or their designee

- Lieutenant Jacinda J. Gunter, Special Victims Division, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Houston Police Department
- Commander Hong-Le Conn, Special Victims Division, Houston Police Department
- Commander Harlan Daniel Harris, Victim Services, Houston Police Department



Candidates for the Inaugural SART (cont.)

A sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Forensic Examiner that provides exams within the County, or if they do not exist, a representative from the largest healthcare provider in the County

- Dr. Amy Castillo, Chief Operating Officer, Houston Forensic Science Center
- Courtney Head, Manager of Forensic Biology, Houston Forensic Science Center
- Jamie Ferrell, Clinical Director, Memorial Hermann Health System, Forensic Nursing Services
- Dr. Sally Henin, Chief of Medical Operations, Memorial Hermann Health Systems, Forensic Nursing Operations
- Sandra Sanchez, Program Director, Forensic Nursing Harris Health System
- Dr. Khara Breeden, Chief Executive Officer, The Forensic Center of Excellence
- Micala Clark, Legal Counsel, The Forensic Center of Excellence



Candidates for the Inaugural SART (cont.)

A mental or behavioral health provider within the County, or if they do not exist a representative from the public health department; and

- Wayne Young, Chief Executive Officer, The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD

Other persons or professionals the SART considers necessary for the operation of the response team

- Brenda Sykes, Executive Director, Bay Area Turning Point
- Wykesha Dixon, Program Director at Bay Area Turning Point Inc.
- Olivia Rivers, CEO/Executive Director, The Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc.
- Barbie Brashear, MSW Executive Director, Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council
- Monica Gonzales, Senior Litigator, Felony Trial Division, Harris County Public Defender's Office



Next Steps

- Commissioners Court appoint inaugural members of SART
 - Once approved, a meeting for the SART will be scheduled on or before December 1, 2021 in compliance with SB 476.

Next Steps (cont.)

- At this first meeting:
 - A presiding officer will be elected
 - Determine the addition of other members who may be necessary for the SARTs operation
 - Discuss collaboration and information sharing with criminal justice systems, local law enforcement agencies, and service providers not already on the SART
 - Future meetings for 2022 (quarterly) will be scheduled
 - Begin work on the organization structure and by-laws
- Written protocol and data collection needs to be completed by December 1, 2022.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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